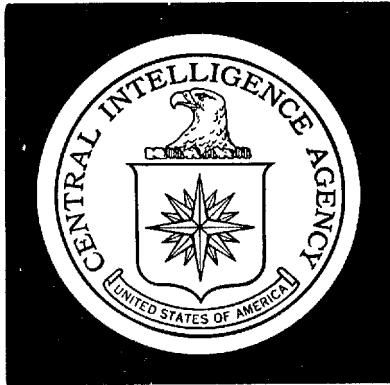


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28 October 1968

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# *Central Intelligence Bulletin*

## *CONTENTS*

France: Paris is again probing for US reaction to possible greater nuclear defense cooperation.

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**Next 7 Page(s) In Document Exempt**

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FRANCE: PARIS IS AGAIN PROBING FOR US REACTION TO POSSIBLE GREATER COOPERATION IN NUCLEAR DEFENSE MATTERS.

AN ADVISER CLOSE TO THE FRENCH DEFENSE MINISTER TOLD A US EMBASSY OFFICIAL [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] THAT FRANCE HOPES TO PERSUADE THE NEXT US ADMINISTRATION TO GRANT FRANCE EQUALITY WITH THE UK IN THE ACQUISITION OF NUCLEAR EQUIPMENT AND KNOWLEDGE. THE FRENCH OFFICIAL SAID THAT THE POSSIBILITY OF FUTURE MILITARY COOPERATION IN THE NATO CONTEXT WAS NOW UNDER STUDY AND WAS NOT EXCLUDED. SUCH COOPERATION, HOWEVER, WOULD BE THE RESULT OF A PROCESS OF GRADUAL EVOLUTION.

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[REDACTED]  
THESE ARE THE LATEST IN A SERIES OF SIGNALS THAT FRENCH FOREIGN POLICY HAS BEEN IN A STATE OF FLUX SINCE THE CZECHOSLOVAK CRISIS. THE INVASION WAS A SEVERE SETBACK TO DE GAULLE'S POLICY OF DETENTE IN EUROPE. SINCE AUGUST, HE HAS BEEN GROPING FOR A POLICY INITIATIVE WHICH COULD PRESERVE A DOMINANT ROLE FOR FRANCE IN EUROPE AND, AT THE SAME TIME, EASE THE FEARS OF HIS WEST EUROPEAN NEIGHBORS ABOUT SOVIET INTENTIONS WITHOUT INCREASING THE US PRESENCE. THE FRENCH HAD HINTED IN SEPTEMBER THAT THE CONCEPT OF A TRIPARTITE US-UK-FRENCH NUCLEAR DIRECTORATE SHOULD BE REVIVED.

THIS NEWEST FEELER ON A SPECIAL ROLE FOR FRANCE IN NUCLEAR MATTERS WILL HAVE A DISQUIETING EFFECT IN WESTERN EUROPE, ONCE IT BECOMES KNOWN. THE GERMANS HAVE ALREADY EXPRESSED ALARM ABOUT SIMILAR PROPOSALS WHICH WOULD PUT THEM IN A SUBORDINATE ROLE IN EUROPEAN NUCLEAR AFFAIRS. ON THE OTHER HAND, SOME BRITISH OFFICIALS MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY IF THE FRENCH WOULD OFFER SOMETHING IN RETURN, SUCH AS BROADENED COMMERCIAL EXCHANGES. [REDACTED]

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